

Wallace and McAllister Buildings
631-633 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5150

HABS
PA
2-PITBU
41-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
PA,
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41-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WALLACE AND MCALISTER BUILDINGS

HABS No. PA-5150

Location: Wallace Building - 631 Liberty Avenue
McAlister Building - 633 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Quadrangle Name: Pittsburgh West/Pittsburgh East
Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000

UTM References:

- a. Zone: 17 Easting: 584700 Northing: 4477110
- b. Zone: 17 Easting: 584690 Northing: 4477170
- c. Zone: 17 Easting: 584830 Northing: 4477220
- d. Zone: 17 Easting: 584860 Northing: 4477140

Present Owner: Penn Liberty Holding Company

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vscant

Significance:

The buildings at 631-633 Liberty Avenue were significant for both their original role as produce commission houses in the 1890s and subsequent use as mercantile stores unified by a common facade in 1913. The construction of the Wallace Building (631) and McAlister Building (633) in 1894 marked the height of the produce commission trade that located along Liberty Avenue from Sixth to Eleventh streets in the latter half of the nineteenth century. John Wallace and the McAlister Bros. were well-estblished within their trade, having been in the district long before they built new warehouses. Architecturally, both buildings once reflected Pittsburgh's romance with Richardsonian Romanesque style and massing as interpreted by prominent local architects T.H. Scott (631) and John P. Brennan (633). Finally, the buildings were important as a barometer of change in this area of downtown Pittsburgh. While commission merchants such as Wallace and McAlister moved southwest towards Ferry and Water streets and the B & O Railroad lines or east towards 21st Street in the early twentieth century, more luxurious retailers, wholesalers, and offices took their place. The refacing of 631 and 633 with a single terra cotta Jacobean-Gothic facade reflected the area's transition into a fashionable commercial center.

Wallace Building

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1894

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Yearly Docket of Building Permits, Vol. 11, 6 March 1894.

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, Vol. 9, 24 January 1894.

2. Architect:

Thomas H. Scott (born 1865) educated in the public schools of Washington County, established his practice in Pittsburgh in 1889 as a member of the firm of Scott and Peebles. He succeeded to sole control of the firm one year later and designed numerous commercial, institutional, and residential buildings. Among these commissions were the Machesney Building, the Wilksburg High School, the Standard Steel Car Company's offices, and the McCance Building, as well as twenty years of service as the architect for the Denny estate.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny County Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1892 Deed, February 27, 1892, recorded in Volume 782, pages 394 - 95.

Thomas Brown and Nancy, his wife, to John Wallace.

1899 Will, January, 1899, recorded in Will Book Volume 59, page 27.

John Wallace to John J. Wallace, half interest, and James H. Wallace, half interest.

- 1907 Will, July 31, 1907, recorded in Will Book Volume 92,
page 341.
John J. Wallace to Maggie J. Trussell Wallace, half
interest.
- 1912 Deed, May 10, 1912, recorded in Volume 1715, page 151.
Maggie J. Trussell Wallace to James H. Wallace, half
interest.
- 1958 Deed, January 17, 1958, recorded in Volume 3697,
pages 27 - 28.
Corrected March 30, 1958, recorded in Volume 3686,
pages 332 - 33.
Elizabeth Wallace, Attorney-in-fact, Estate of James H.
Wallace to Fidelity Trust Co., Trustee under the Last
Will and Testament of Margaret H. W. Watson, for the D.
T. Watson for Crippled Children.
- 1964 Deed, March 30, 1964, recorded in Volume 4113,
pages 559 - 60.
Pittsburgh National Bank, Trustee, to Jerome A. Josephs
and Natalie M., his wife, half interest, and Marvin M.
Josephs and Lois S., his wife, half interest.
- 1967 Deed, September 14, 1967, recorded in Volume 4433,
pages 233 - 36.
Marvin M. Josephs and Lois S., his wife, Marvin M.
Josephs, half interest.
- 1980 Deed, January 16, 1980, recorded in Volume 6252,
pages 88 - 90.
Marvin M. Josephs to Marvin M. Josephs and Eileen
Shirley, his wife, half interest.
- 1983 Deed, June 3, 1983, recorded in Volume 6666,
pages 140 - 45.
Jerome A. Josephs and Natalie A., his wife, and Marvin M.
Josephs and Eileen Shirley, his wife, to Penn Liberty
Holding Company.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

Kerr and Fox was a well established contracting firm that branched from the parent firm, Wm. Kerr's Sons, in 1893, and operated under the name of Kerr and Fox until 1907 when the firm of C.H. Kerr Company was incorporated. C.H. Kerr entered his father William's building business in 1889 after completing his public school education in Pittsburgh. Although it is not clear as to which other projects C.H. Kerr completed as "Kerr and Fox" the Kerr family of builders' list of works includes the Jacob Kaufman home, the Western Savings and Deposit Bank of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Presbyterian Church, Wilkesburg High School, the Iroquois Apartments, the Harper Building, and three public schools of Pittsburgh.

J. Charles Wilson, contractor for the major 1913 alteration that joined the facades of 631 and 633 Liberty Avenue, also descended from a leading Pittsburgh firm, A & S Wilson Company. J. Charles Wilson, son of Samuel Wilson, obtained his education in the Pittsburgh public schools and at the Western University of Pennsylvania. He learned the carpenter's trade from his father and entered the firm of A & S Wilson in 1887. Upon his father's death in 1891, Wilson and his brother Adam took over the business and ran the company together until Adam's death in 1912, since which time J. Charles Wilson served as president of the company. The firm executed numerous commercial buildings including the Keenan Building at 643 - 647 Liberty (1906) and the Arbuthnot building at 719 - 721 Liberty (1892).

5. Original plans and construction:

The original Wallace Building was a five-story brick warehouse with its Liberty Avenue facade sheathed with rock-faced ashlar. The structure occupied its entire site (approximately 20 by 110 feet) and was estimated to have cost \$13,000. The stair to the upper loft floors was located along the east wall in the rear third of the building, and an elevator, believed to be original, was located opposite the stair, along the west wall.

6. Alterations and additions:

The most significant alteration to the Wallace Building occurred in 1913, as documented in the Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Record Book of Alterations and Repairs, Volume 6, 15 January 1913, permit #1657. Along with the McCallister Building at 633 Liberty Avenue, the front wall was rebuilt entirely, at an estimated cost of \$6,140 per building. The two buildings were given a common facade, constructed of steel and sheathed with glazed terra cotta. As part of this transformation, the romaneque arched windows in the upper floors were replaced by regular rectangular openings. Subsequently, the first and second floors were radically altered. This work likely dates to 1948 when son, James H. Wallace filed building permit #650 with plans to remodel the store front for a cost estimated at \$3,500,00.

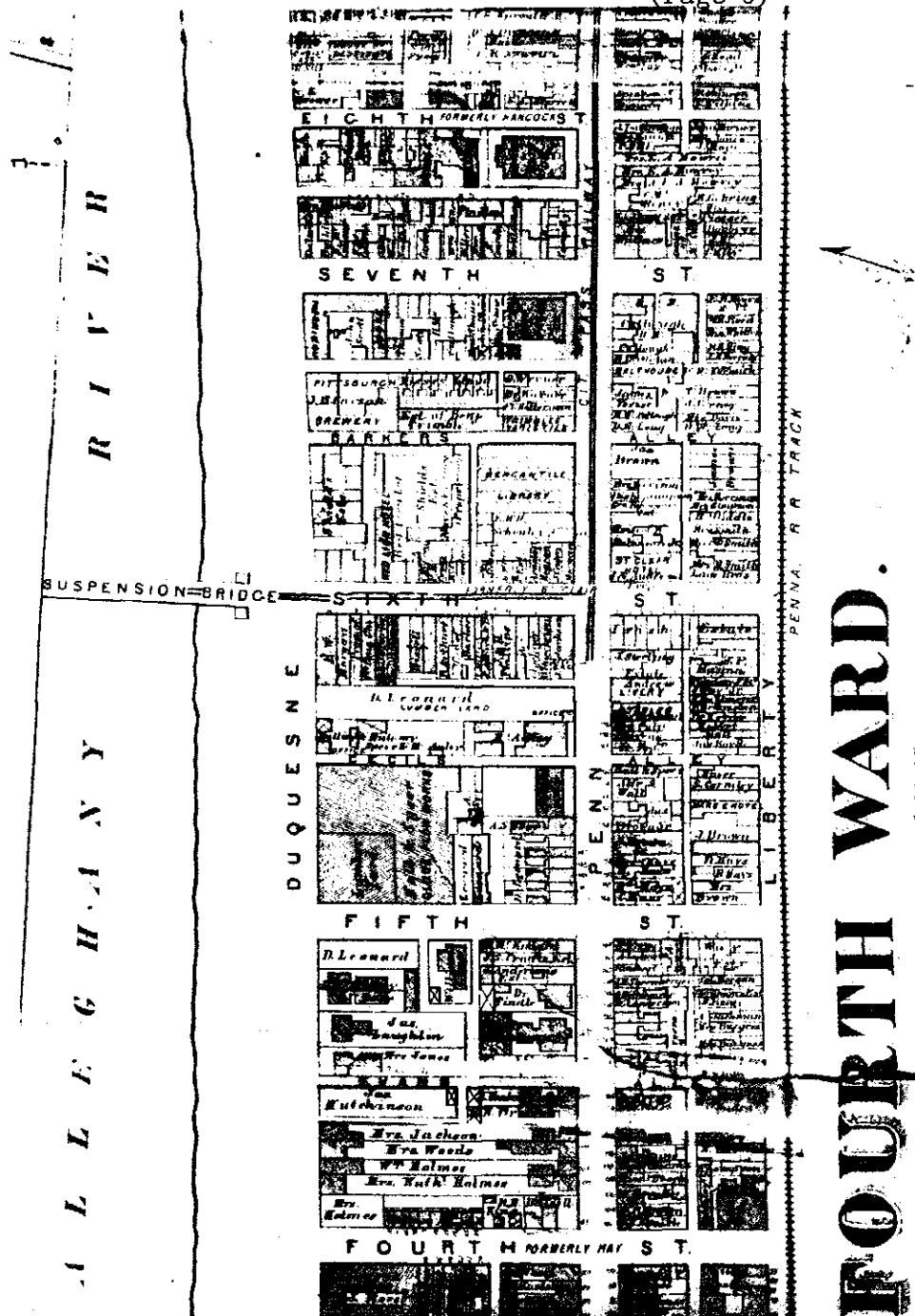
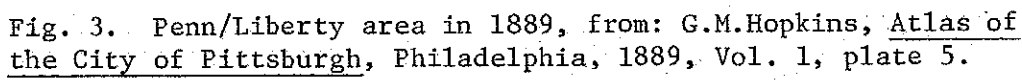


Fig. 1. Penn/Liberty area in 1872, from: G.M. Hopkins, Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Adjoining Boroughs, Philadelphia, 1872, pl. 22-23.

Fig. 2. Penn/Liberty area in 1882, from: G.M. Hopkins, Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Philadelphia, 1882, plate 1.

Explorationen
Hend. u. Steen Poulsen



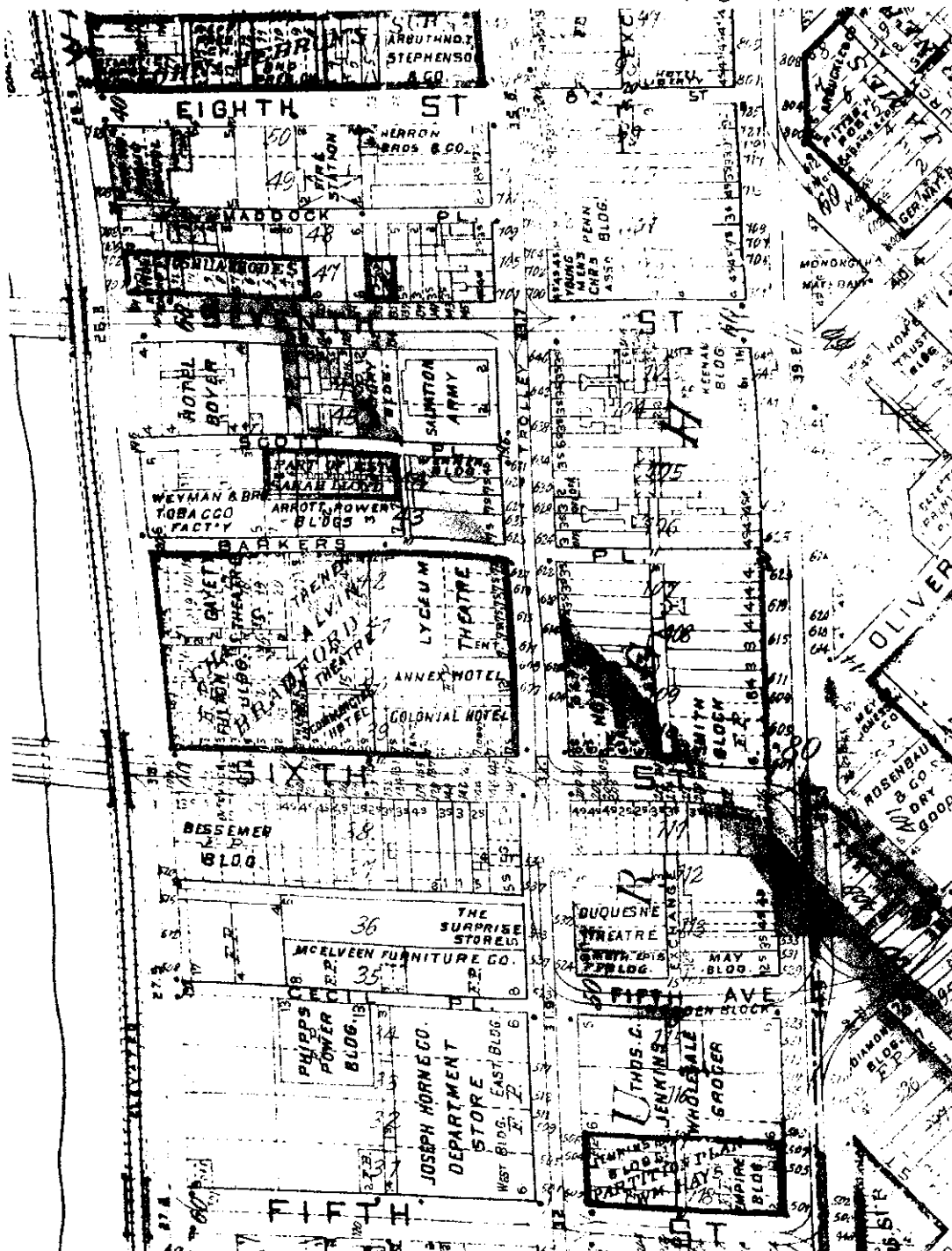


Fig. 4. Penn/Liberty area in 1910, from: C.M.Hopkins,
Map of Greater Pittsburgh, PA, Philadelphia, 1910, plate 1.

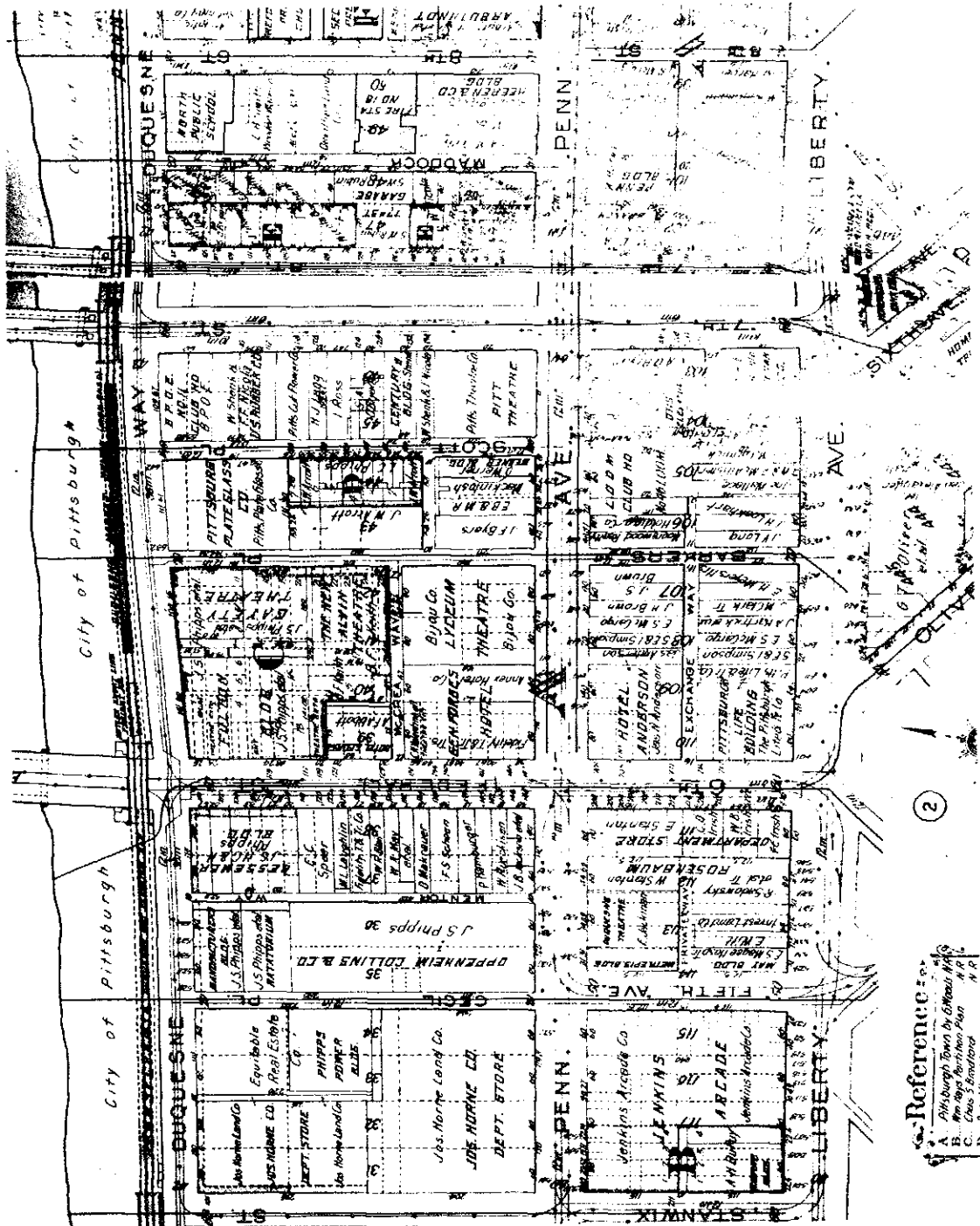


Fig. 5. Penn/Liberty area in 1923, from: G.M.Hopkins, Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, 1923, Vol. 1, plate 4.

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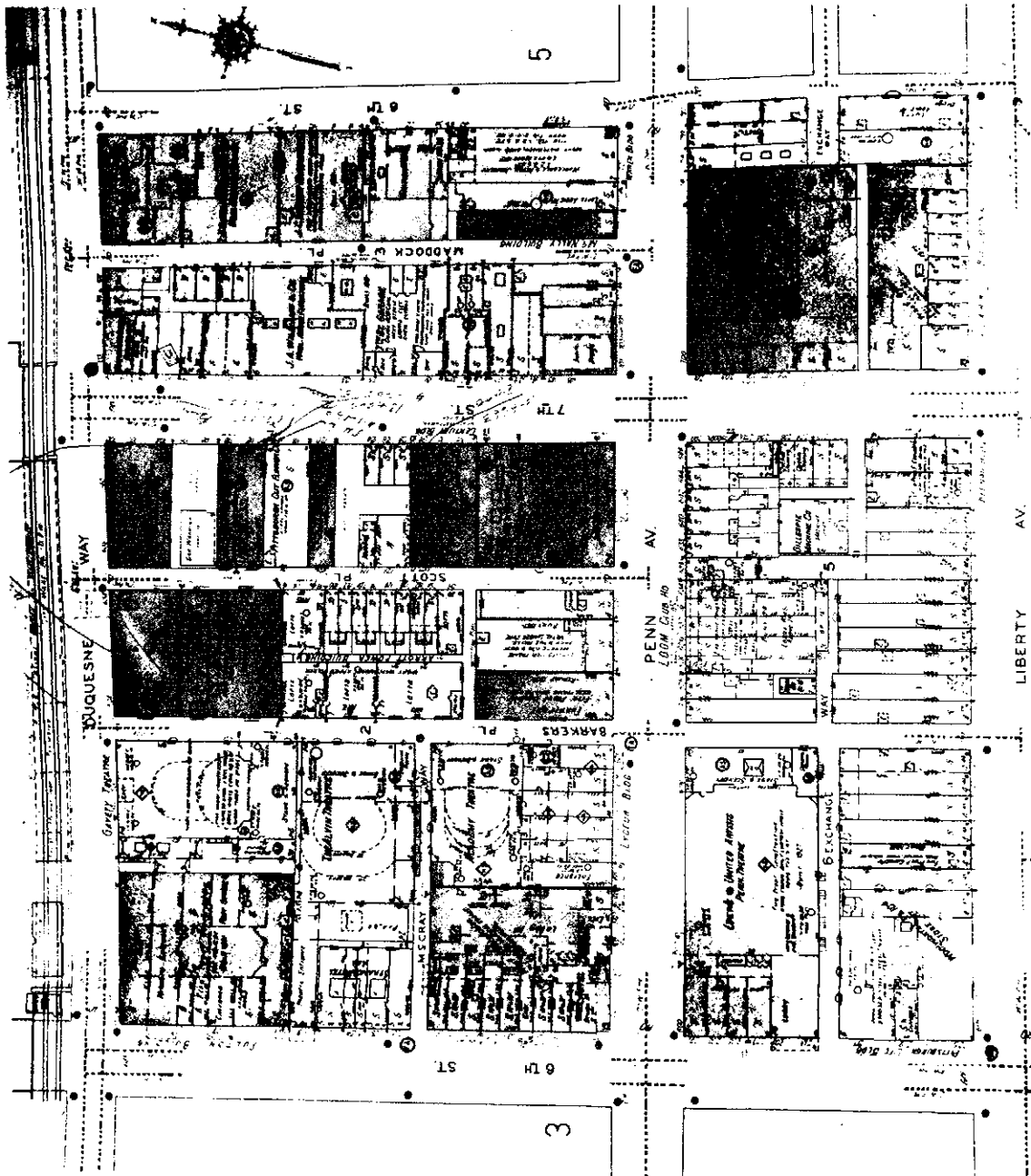


Fig. 6. Penn/ Liberty area in 1927, from: Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh, New York, 1927, Vol. 1, plate 4.

B. Historical Context:

City industrial histories note the principal development of the commission merchant trade in the 1860s, a date which corresponds with the demolition of the city markets in 1852, and the advent of rail transportation. The Pennsylvania Railroad at Seventh and Grant street ran its Freight Division along Liberty Avenue as early as 1851 and the Citizens' Passenger Railway shuttled up and down Penn Avenue by 1859. Shortly after 1889, the freight lines along Liberty Avenue moved two blocks north to Duquesne Way, and Liberty Avenue, too, supported trolley lines that gave the general public easy access to the street, while proximity of the Sixth Street Bridge that crossed the Allegheny River provided one more important transportation artery. The combined effect of these circumstances was to make the 600-1100 blocks of Liberty Avenue primary locations for commerce and shipping. Photographs of the district dating from the 1880s, 1890s, and early twentieth century confirm this pattern of development. Typically, three-story converted brick dwellings, and later, four and five-story brick warehouses, roughly 18 feet wide and 100 feet deep, were dressed with signs that listed "Produce", "Cantelopes", "Fruit", "Iron City Produce", and the like. Shed porches spanned across the side walks, providing shelter for delivery, while creating the old street market ambience. The sheds were built in front of old and new buildings, including 631, 633, and 635 Liberty, all of which dated from the 1890s.

The concentration of produce commission houses on Liberty Avenue was remarkable. The 1885 city directory lists commission merchants at 605, 607, 611, 613, 619, 621, 625, 629, 631, 633, 635, 637, 639 and 641, in short, at all but five properties of the 600 block. With the growing number of commission merchants and sales throughout the 1890s, it is not surprising that thirty of the leading firms organized the Pittsburgh Produce and Fruit Exchange in 1895. The purpose of the Exchange was to increase business even further and protect the interests of both its members and shippers. By 1905 the trade was shifting east out of the increasingly congested downtown, toward the railroad produce depot at 21st and 22nd and Liberty; a secondary destination was southwest towards the B & O Railroad line near Ferry and Water streets. That direction is apparent in the number of merchants on the 600 block of Liberty; eleven in 1902, and six in 1906. In their place came theaters, places of amusement,

offices, and more luxurious dry goods operations such as clothing, furniture, and jewelry stores that made the region an adjunct to the booming downtown.

The Wallace Building was erected at the height of Liberty Avenue's era as a center for commission merchants. John Wallace was one of the trade's old-timers, having been listed in Thurston's Pittsburgh and Allegheny in the Centennial Year as a partner in one of the fourteen firms established by 1876. At that time, his firm, Wibert and Wallace, operated their commission house at 613 Liberty Avenue (old 187), a residential-scale building that bore Wallace's name until at least 1899, the date of a photograph published in 100 Views of Pittsburgh. Even before Wallace built his larger warehouse at 631 Liberty, the site was occupied by commission merchant James H. Loh and Co. as early as 1873, and by H. J. McCracken from approximately 1880 to 1896. Although John Wallace purchased the site in 1892, and erected his warehouse in 1894, he traded from his store at 613 Liberty Avenue until 1897 when he moved into the Wallace Building. In 1906, Wallace moved his business to Ferry Street.

While the Wallace family retained ownership of the building until 1958, they leased it to various tenants. One of their long-term tenants was Lechner and Schoenberger Co. (1913 to 1932), who advertised records and Victrolas in 1915, and pianos in 1930. A newspaper article in the Pittsburgh Gazette-Times, 8 January 1913, binted about an attempt to sell the Wallace property, but instead the Wallace heirs collaborated with their neighbor at 633, the McAlister brothers, to rebuild and combine the fronts into a more fashionable, Jacobean Gothic terra cotta and steel facade. The only other tenants of record are Independent Wallpaper Co. (1935), Kings Clothes Inc. (1940 - 60) and the Coach House clothing store in the 1980s, all indicative of the commercial transformation of this area of downtown Pittsburgh.



Fig. 7. 600 Block of Liberty in 1899, from: 100 Views of Pittsburgh,
H. Hammond Hook and Co., 1899.

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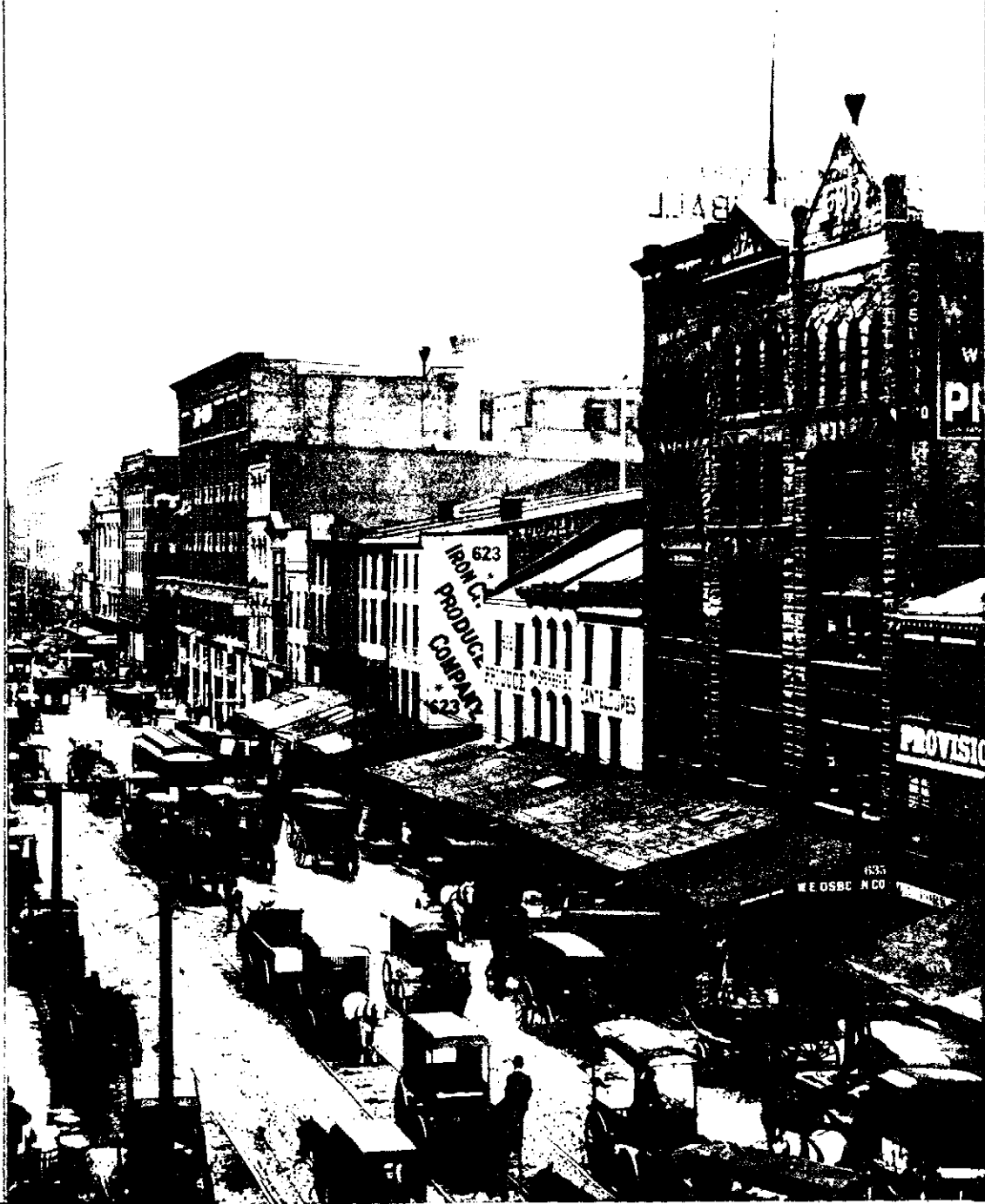


Fig. 8. 600 Block of Liberty Avenue, from: Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library, Photo Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

Thomas H. Scott designed the five-story commercial loft warehouse for John Wallace in a style typical of Pittsburgh architecture in the 1890s. Though essentially of common bond brick, the building once faced Liberty Avenue with a rock-faced ashlar facade clearly influenced by Henry Hobson Richardson's Allegheny Courthouse nearby on Grant Street. Scott adapted the Richardsonian vocabulary, creating stone piers that rose to a fourth story tripartite window set within a Romanesque arch. A thin cornice capped that volume, above which stone piers again rose to triple arches of the fifth floor. An overscaled frieze advertised "18 John Wallace 94" and a robustly dentilled stone cornice completed the composition. The building was fronted by a lean-to shed porch, carried on wood or iron columns at the street curb. In 1913, this Richardsonian stonework was replaced by a Jacobean-Gothic buff terra cotta facade that joined the Wallace Building with its neighbor the McAlister Building. Despite alterations, this latter facade described the building until 1984. The facade was noteworthy for the Jacobean-inspired collection of monkeys, griffons, escutcheons, swags, and garlands that animated the otherwise austere geometry of the terra cotta piers and spandrels. Late medieval English influence also was seen in the second floor Jacobean arched windows, eventually masked for a shopfront.

The interior was simple, as would be expected for its original function as a produce warehouse. It consisted of clear-span spaces with a stair and an elevator rising to upper floors. The position of the elevator along the west wall is confirmed by the 1927 Sanborn's Atlas.

Note: All further detailed description will focus upon the building as it appeared with its terra cotta facade in 1984.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

The building at 631 Liberty Avenue occupied 100-percent of its 20' x 114' site, extending from Liberty Avenue through to Exchange Way on the rear. The Sanborn Atlas gives a height of 64 feet. Interior dimensions were taken as 18' 8" by 114' 0" with the lost space presumably taken up in the party walls. The terra cotta skin added slightly to this overall dimension.

2. Foundations:

Foundations were rubblestone, with coursed masonry at grade on the rear Exchange Way facade.

3. Walls:

Partywalls were of common bond brick, with flues contained within the wall. The Sanborn Atlas lists diminishing wall thicknesses, with 16" at the first, second and third floors, and 12" at the upper two stories. The rear wall of 631 Liberty consisted of alternating courses of headers and stretchers.

4. Structural system, framing:

The framing was conventional wood timber, spanning the 18' 8" of the interior, and spaced at regular intervals, presumably 12" on center. Although there is no evidence of steel girders or other modern construction systems in the original building, demolition photographs show that the new Liberty Avenue facade was framed with steel columns and girders from which the terra cotta blocks were hung, as well as a steel arch for the entryway.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

The Jacobean Gothic facade was built without porches, stoops, balconies or bulkheads although a colonial oriel was added to the second floor as part of a shopfront alteration.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

The 1913 facade very likely had its entrance located between or adjacent to shop windows in light of the neighborhood's increasing retail character. Insufficient evidence exists to determine the specific first floor doorway alterations, although the overall effect of shopfront improvements was to redefine the two lower stories. The rear of 631 Liberty had a central door which may have been enlarged to its last recorded height.

b. Windows and shutters:

As evidenced by demolition photographs, openings were deeply recessed with transoms above windows comprised of single lights that operated on pivot sash. The rear of 631 Liberty had a window above the central door and tall windows flanking either side. Steel lintels across all three windows carried the weight of the upper floors.

7. Roof:

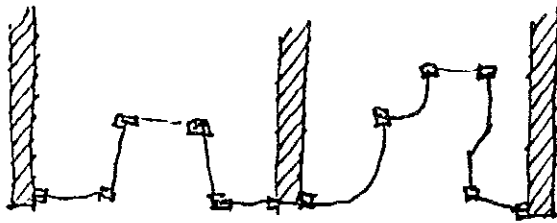
a. Shape, covering:

The roof appears to have sloped back slightly from the front, creating approximately a half story of additional attic space, and to have been covered with built up roofing.

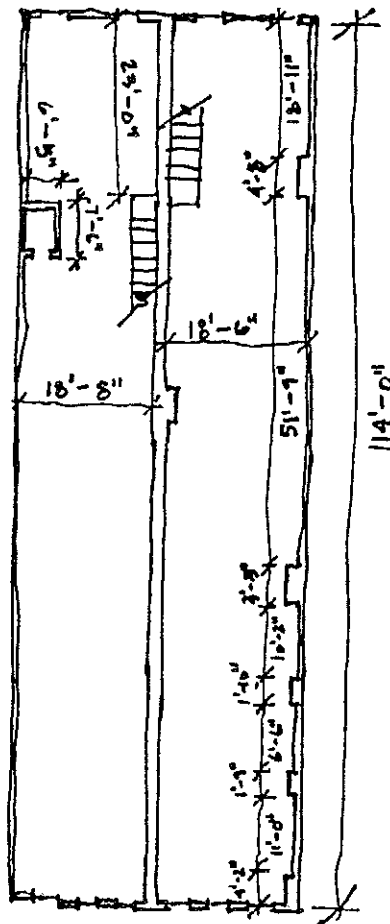
b. Cornice, eaves:

The fifth story had a projecting dentilled cornice above which panels of terra cotta with moulded swags and garlands, and monkeys seated upon pedestals and grasping escutcheons, capped the building.

ENTRY PLAN



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631-633 LIBERTY AVE.

(THE COACH HOUSE, LOMAKIN'S)

Fig. 9. Sketch plan, first floor, 631-3 Liberty Avenue, by John Bertola and Philip Snyder, of Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, Pittsburgh, PA.

C. Description of Interior:

Documentary evidence of the interior relies primarily upon the 1984 survey executed by the architectural firm of Kingsland, Bauer, and Havekotte. Their sketch plan of the main floor reveals a conventional Pittsburgh loft, open the full width of the building. In the rear third, stairs along the east wall and an elevator along the west wall rise the full height of the building. This interior plan is confirmed by the 1927 Sanborn Atlas which shows the position of the elevator. It should be noted that the position of the stair and elevator suggests that the building always was used by a single tenant; whether the building was so altered during the alterations of 1913, or had been constructed like that is unclear from the available evidence.

McAlister Building

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1894

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Yearly Docket of Building Permits, 9 January 1894.
Also, date in gable of original building.

2. Architect:

John P. Brennan, whose biography is recorded amply in the Book of Prominent Pennsylvanians, 1913 (page 208), Jordan's Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography, 1916 (pages 2182-83), and Pittsburgh of To-day, 1896, designed the McAlister Building as well as its neighbor the McCormick Building at 635 Liberty. Both of these were documented in the last of these biographies. Brennan (born 1851) hailed from Philadelphia where he graduated

from LaSalle College, then began his architectural study in the office of E.F. Durang, a popular architect among Catholic churches and institutions. Brennan studied with Durang for three years, followed by three years with Addison Hutton. In 1882 Brennan came to Pittsburgh where he associated himself with George S. Orth for eighteen months and Andrew Peebles for one year. After working independently for one year, Brennan formed a partnership with Charles Bickel, and under the name Bickel and Brennan, designed the German National Bank at Sixth and Wood and several other important structures. In 1891, the partnership was dissolved and Brennan practiced alone until 1898, during which period he designed the McAlister Building as well as the McKnight and Victory Building on Fourth Avenue, many residences, and not surprisingly, a long list of Catholic churches and institutions. From 1898 to 1905, Brennan worked in the engineering department of the Carnegie Steel Company, leaving to serve as City Architect of Pittsburgh. At this position, Brennan completed several engineering and institutional projects.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny County Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

- 1891 Deed, April 23, 1891, recorded in Volume 731,
pages 216 - 18.
Augustus E. Succop and Louisa F., his wife, to William
McAlister and Patrick McAlister.
- 1899 Will, January 8, 1899, recorded in Will Book Volume 57,
page 307.
William McAlister to Fidelity Title and Trust Company of
Pittsburgh, half interest, and to sons William John
McAlister and Raymond Patrick McAlister, half interest.
- 1918 Deed, April 11, 1918, recorded in Volume 1943,
pages 339 - 40.
Fidelity Title and Trust Company of Pittsburgh to William
John McAlister, one fourth interest.

- Deed, April 11, 1918, recorded in Volume 1943,
pages 341 - 42.
Fidelity Title and Trust Company of Pittsburgh to Raymond
Patrick McAlister, one fourth interest.
- 1920 Deed, July 23, 1920, recorded in Volume 2109,
pages 540 - 41.
William J. and Raymond P. McAlister, one half interest,
to McAlister Bros., one half interest.
- 1927 Patrick McAlister died intestate March 5, 1927.
Heirs at law, sisters Mary Batty and Sadie McAlister and
nephews William A. Young, William J. McAlister and
Raymond P. McAlister.
- 1956 Deed, September 21, 1956, recorded in Volume 3588,
pages 299 - 304.
McAlister Bros., et al, to Ethel M. Levenson and Rose G.
Weiss.
- 1967 Deed, April 12, 1967, recorded in Volume 4389,
pages 593 - 96.
Ethel M. Levenson and Rose G. Weiss and Benjamin, her
husband, to Nicholas Lomakin.
- 1984 Deed, March 1, 1984, recorded in Volume 6825,
pages 170 - 73.
Nicholas Lomakin to Penn Liberty Holding Company.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

The 1894 building permit listed Murphy and Hamilton as
contractors for the McAlister Building. In 1899 T.J. Hamilton
and J.H. Murphy advertised themselves as carpenters and
builders, and general contractors, with offices, carpenter shop,
and lumber yard at Brushton Avenue and the Pennsylvania
Railroad, and city offices at the Builders Exchange. Murphy and
Hamilton, who also built the McCormick Building designed by
Brennan, continued their practice well into the twentieth
century.

J. Charles Wilson, contractor for the major 1913 alteration that joined the facades of 631 and 633 Liberty Avenue, also descended from a leading Pittsburgh firm, A & S Wilson Company. J. Charles Wilson, son of Samuel Wilson, obtained his education in the Pittsburgh public schools and at the Western University of Pennsylvania. He learned the carpenter's trade from his father and entered the firm of A & S Wilson in 1887. Upon his father's death in 1891, Wilson and his brother Adam took over the business and ran the company together until Adam's death in 1912, since which time J. Charles Wilson served as president of the company. The firm executed numerous commercial buildings including the Keenan Building at 643 - 647 Liberty (1906) and the Arbuthnot building at 719 - 721 Liberty (1892).

5. Original plans and construction:

According to the original building permit, the McAlister Building was constructed as a five-story brick building, 20' by 110 feet, at an estimated cost of \$16,000. An account of the premises in Allegheny County, PA., Illustrated, 1896, describes a five-storied and basement brick building, 22 by 120 feet in lineal dimensions. It followed the norm for Pittsburgh loft buildings of the 1890s, having clear span spaces at all floors and heavy timber and masonry construction. The walls were of common bond brick, with rock-faced ashlar on the Liberty Avenue facade. The original stair was located in the rear third, along the west wall, and the original elevator, since removed, was located midway along the west wall as evidenced by the 1927 Sanborn's Atlas.

6. Alterations and additions:

The most significant alteration to the McAlister Building occurred in 1913 when the Liberty Avenue facade was joined with the Wallace Building at 631, and rebuilt with a steel frame and buffed terra cotta in a Jacobean-Gothic style. This alteration also changed the fenestration, replacing third and fifth floor arched openings with rectangular ones, and removed the gable that framed "1894". It also added a first floor shopfront. Fire damage in 1953 likely caused some interior alterations, and the chain of retail tenants inevitably left their mark on first floor "improvements."

B. Historical Context:

City industrial histories note the principal development of the commission merchant trade in the 1860s, a date which corresponds with the demolition of the city markets in 1852, and the advent of rail transportation. The Pennsylvania Railroad at Seventh and Grant street ran its Freight Division along Liberty Avenue as early as 1851 and the Citizens' Passenger Railway shuttled up and down Penn Avenue by 1859. Shortly after 1889, the freight line along Liberty Avenue moved two blocks north to Duquesne Way, and Liberty Avenue, too, supported trolley line that gave the general public easy access to the street, while proximity of the Sixth Street Bridge that crossed the Allegheny River provided one more important transportation artery. The combined effect of these circumstances was to make the 600-1100 blocks of Liberty Avenue primary locations for commerce and shipping. Photographs of the district dating from the 1880s, 1890s, and early twentieth century confirm this pattern of development. Typically, three-story converted brick dwellings, and later, four and five-story brick warehouses, roughly 18 feet wide and 100 feet deep, were dressed with signs that listed "Produce", "Cantelopes", "Fruit", "Iron City Produce", and the like. Shed porches spanned across the side walks, providing shelter for delivery, while creating the old street market ambience. The sheds were built in front of old and new buildings, including 631, 633, and 635 Liberty, all of which dated from the 1890s.

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The site of the McAlister Building was occupied by commission merchants as early as 1876 by H. M. Caldwell and Co., in 1880 - 81 by James H. Loh and Co., and in 1885, by Henry B. Rea. William and Patrick McAlister, born in Ireland, though raised and educated in Pittsburgh, established their business in 1876, then purchased the 633 Liberty Avenue property in 1891, while trading at 629 Liberty. By 1894 McAlister Bros. dealt in wholesale produce at their new warehouse, receiving shipments from all over the United States and acting as agents for buyer and seller. Although the McAlister Building was owned by the family until 1956, in 1907 McAlister Bros. had removed to 21st Street along with most commission merchants in the early twentieth century. Patrick McAlister and William McAlister's heirs (William McAlister died January 8, 1899) corroborated with John Wallace's heirs, owners of the Wallace Building at 631 Liberty, and rebuilt the facades of both buildings into one in 1913. Over the next 70 years, the remodeled McAlister Building housed various retail tenants, a typical pattern in this area of downtown Pittsburgh. Among the list of tenants were Lawrence Paint Stores (1930), Bunting Stamp Co. (1930), Joseph Floor Covering Co. (1940), J.W. Willes' Amusement Arcade (1945), and Lomakin Music (1967 - 1984).

For more information on the Penn-Liberty area, see

LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE BUILDING	HABS No. PA-5149
KINGSBACHER'S	HABS No. PA-5151
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)	HABS No. PA-5152
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (McCormick Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-A
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (King Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-B
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Whitten Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-C
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Arbuthnot Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-D
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Harper Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-E
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Lipson Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-F

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Fig. 10. McAlister Building, 633 Liberty Avenue, from Allegheny County Pennsylvania, Illustrated, Consolidated Illustrating Co, Pittsburgh, 1896.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The original McAlister Building displayed the strong influence of Richardsonian Romanesque style architecture in Pittsburgh. Although the inside revealed ordinary loft space, John P. Brennan's treatment of the exterior clearly emulated that of the Allegheny Courthouse. The Liberty Avenue facade of this heavy timber and common bond brick five story warehouse was fronted with rock-faced ashlar. Wide stone piers rose to a single segmental arch at the third floor, then continued to the upper floors, where narrow stone piers divided window openings into thirds. The triplet composition was rectangular at the fourth floor and arched at the fifth floor, in line with the top floor of its neighbor, 635 Liberty. Pivot windows ventilated the building which was fronted by a lean-to shed porch and capped by a stone frieze advertising "McAlister Bros." and a stone gable with "1894" carved in relief. In 1913, this Richardsonian stonework was replaced by a Jacobean-Gothic buff terra cotta facade that joined the McAlister Building with its neighbor the Wallace Building. Despite alterations, this latter facade described the building until 1984. The facade was noteworthy for the Jacobean-inspired collection of monkeys, griffons, escutcheons, swags, and garlands that animated the otherwise austere geometry of the terra cotta piers and spandrels. Late medieval English influence also was seen in the second floor Jacobean arched windows.

The interior was simple, as would be expected for its original function as a produce warehouse. It consisted of clear-span spaces with a stair and an elevator rising to upper floors. The building originally had an elevator along the west wall, although the date of its removal is not known.

Note: All further detailed description will focus upon the building as it appeared with its terra cotta facade in 1984.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

The building at 633 Liberty Avenue occupied 100-percent of its 20' x 114' site, extending from Liberty Avenue through to Exchange Way on the rear. The Sanborn Atlas gives a height of 64 feet. Interior dimensions were taken as 18' 6" by 114' 0" with the lost space presumably taken up in the party walls. The terra cotta skin added slightly to this overall dimension.

2. Foundations:

Foundations were rubblestone, with coursed masonry at grade on the rear Exchange Way facade.

3. Walls:

Partywalls were of common bond brick, with flues contained within the wall. The Sanborn Atlas lists diminishing wall thicknesses, with 16" at the first, second and third floors, and 12" at the upper two stories. The rear wall of 633 Liberty also consisted of common bond brick.

4. Structural system, framing:

The framing was conventional wood timber, spanning the 18' 6" of the interior, and spaced at regular intervals, presumably 12" on center. Although there is no evidence of steel girders or other modern construction systems in the original building, demolition photographs show that the new Liberty Avenue facade was framed with steel columns and girders from which the terra cotta blocks were hung, as well as a steel arch for the entryway.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

The 1913 facade very likely had its entrance located between or adjacent to shop windows in light of the neighborhood's increasing retail character. Insufficient evidence exists to determine the specific first floor doorway alterations. The rear of 633 Liberty had a central door with a segmental arch composed of three rows of brick.

b. Windows and shutters:

As evidenced by demolition photographs, openings were deeply recessed with transoms above windows comprised of single lights that operated on pivot sash. The rear of 633 Liberty was fenestrated by segmental opening with three rows of brick forming the arches.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

The roof appears to have sloped back slightly from the front, creating approximately a half story of additional attic space, and been covered with built up roofing.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The fifth story had a projecting dentilled cornice above which panels of terra cotta with moulded swags and garlands, and monkeys seated upon pedestals and grasping escutcheons, capped the building. (Note: Several of these figures currently are held by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation.)



Fig. 11. Rears of 631 and 633 Liberty Avenue, on left, from Exchange Alley, Files of Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, Pittsburgh, PA.

C. Description of Interior:

Documentary evidence of the interior relies primarily upon the 1984 survey executed by the architectural firm of Kingsland, Bauer, and Havekotte. Their sketch plan of the main floor reveals a conventional Pittsburgh loft, open the full width of the building. In the rear third, stairs along the west wall rise the full height of the building. The 1927 Sanborn Atlas also shows an elevator positioned midway, along the west wall. It should be noted that the position of the stair and elevator suggests that the building always was used by a single tenant; whether the building was so altered during the alterations of 1913, or had been constructed like that is unclear from the available evidence.

WALLACE AND MCALISTER BUILDINGS

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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18 December 1984.

Richard Palucci, Mellon-Stewart Contractors. Interview with George E. Thomas. Discussion of demolition, with photographs of buildings as basis for commentary. Mr. Palucci was the supervisor and prime contractor on the job. 9 January 1985.

Frank Crown, head of Crown Demolition which handled the actual wrecking of the buildings. Telephone interview with George E. Thomas. 9 January 1985.

John Bertola and Philip Snyder, interns from Kingsland, Bauer, and Havekotte, Architects. Interview with George E. Thomas about demolition of buildings and discussion of sketch plans. 9 January 1985.

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Clio Group, Inc.
15 February 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Allegheny International project is a continuation of the downtown redevelopment of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle. Spurred by the success of the Heinz Hall complex, and motivated by the availability of the Stanley Theater, the Allegheny Conference for Community Development commissioned Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin to prepare the Penn/Liberty Urban Design Study which was completed in late 1979. The consultants found the region to be underutilized, and proposed three focii -- a performing arts center, a convention center, and the riverfront. Though buildings were often of high architectural character, changes in shopfronts had degraded the street level. Moreover, it was clear that as the effects of removing heavy industry from the river edge of the downtown continued to occur, the support zones that had developed to serve them in Penn/Liberty would become increasingly derelict. On the other hand, just as transportation had reshaped the region in the 1850s, it could be anticipated that the new subway would have a similar impact in the 1980s. The 600 and 700 blocks were found to have buildings of modest architectural interest -- with the exception of the Moose Hall, Kingsbacher's, and 631 - 633 Liberty, and recommendations were made that argued for the removal of many of those buildings to emphasize the area as a cultural center. It was assumed that in the end, while the Heinz Hall, Stanley Theater, and perhaps the Moose would stay, that the other buildings would be replaced by a larger office block fronting on Liberty Avenue.

Three years after the Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin study, newspaper stories reported the acquisition of property in the 600 block of Liberty and Penn Streets, by the operators of Heinz Hall, and in November of 1983 the Post Gazette reported that the Penn/Liberty project had been unveiled (19 November 1983). With Allegheny International as the prime mover two office towers would be erected, and the Stanley Theater would be restored. Land acquisition proceeded from 1980 until 1984, with the new owner being the Penn Liberty Holding Company or its subsidiaries.

In 1983 it became clear that the new project probably would cause the demolition of the Moose Hall while some concerns were expressed about the demolition of the adjacent sbop buildings as well (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "Triangle Landmark May Affect Tower Plan" 30 November 1983). The Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation dropped its opposition to the Moose Hall demolition in December of 1983 and on February 10, 1984, Louise Ferguson, Executive Director of the Foundation, announced their reasons. "Allegheny International would not go ahead with the Moose Building (in place on Penn Avenue)." The Post Gazette had already argued editorially "No Place for Moose" (5 December 1983), "What is clear is that the city stands to gain greatly from the construction of the new headquarters for Allegheny International, which will be a center for cultural as well as corporate activity. The Moose Hall should not be allowed to block that farsighted endeavor."

The final solution was a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, and the Pittsburgh Trust for Cultural Resources (Penn Liberty Holding Company), the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and the Pittsburgh Historic Review Commission to record the streetscape elevation of 631 - 641 and 719 - 725 Liberty Avenue, the Moose Hall, and 636 Penn Avenue, and to provide individual elevations of 631 - 633, 637 Liberty and the elevation and plans of the Moose Hall. Sponsored by the Heinz Endowment, the drawings were produced under the direction of John Hnedak, Office of Cultural Programs, Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service, by Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, architects of Pittsburgh, PA, in the summer of 1984. Supervising architect was Roger L. Kingsland, and the buildings were measured and drafted by Philip J. Snyder and John A. Bertola. At that time, the buildings were also surveyed, and sketch plans and data on them were gathered. In the autumn of 1984, George E. Thomas, Ph.D. and Carol A. Benenson, M.S., of the Clio Group, Historic Consultants, surveyed the standing buildings, developed the research and historic background and prepared the written documentation. During this later phase of the project, Rebecca Trumball of the Office of Cultural Programs, National Park Service, assumed direction of the Penn-Liberty report.